

Leaving Hamburg

BY ANDREA BENTSCHNEIDER

EVEN TODAY, THE VALUE of passenger departure lists from Hamburg, Germany, is boundless. For many family historians, they may be the only source in which the origin of German or Eastern European ancestors can be determined. And of all emigration record collections worldwide, this is the only one that survived the last 150 years almost completely intact.

For a period of almost 85 years, from 1850–1934, the Hamburg passenger departure lists documented the destiny of some 5 to 6 million people who left Europe from the port of Hamburg for far-away destinations such as North and South America, Australia, Africa, and even Asia. The majority of these passengers left their homes searching for religious and political freedom or job opportunities and wealth. In later years they were joined by business travelers. Around 1900, they were accompanied by the first tourists on cruises.

The Hamburg departure lists contain personal data about each passenger—you get first and last name, age, occupation, and the hometown or last place of residence and state.

In the early years, there is less information; for later years the records are more detailed.

In 1855, record keepers added a name index to the passenger lists. The index isn't perfect. It's roughly sorted chronologically and by the first letter of the passenger's last name. However, the index is an invaluable tool to access the passenger lists when you do not know the exact date of departure or name of the vessel on which your ancestors sailed. Plus, it serves as an homage to popular culture—sifting through the records you'll find names including piano maker Steinway, hair dresser Max Factor, journalist Joseph Pulitzer, and beer brewer Adolph Coors.

To see records from a specific geographic area available at Ancestry.com, select the Search tab and browse by location.

Editor's note: Don't let a foreign language scare you. While Hamburg passenger lists are written in German, a number of details you'll be searching have been translated into English on Ancestry.com.



Will there ever be more people seeking departed ancestors than there are ancestors to be sought?

Scientific American answered that question once and for all when the publication decided to find out if the number of living humans could outnumber the dead. Using information collected in 2002 by the Population Reference Bureau, projected birth and death rates, and the expertise of population professor Joel Cohen from Columbia University, *Scientific American* came to the following conclusion: while 6.5 billion living people currently roam the earth, slowing growth rates will mean Earth's population will peak at approximately 10 billion people around the year 2200. That's a far cry from the 100 billion people Cohen calculates would be necessary for the living to ever outnumber the dead.

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Watch in February as the PBS series *African American Lives* uncovers the ancestry of Maya Angelou, Morgan Freeman, Peter Gomes, Linda Johnson Rice, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, Tom Joyner, and Tina Turner. Check TV listings for times and details.

